

LGBCE (15)1st Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 27 January 2015, at 09:30am, in Rooms A & B, Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG

Commissioners Present

Max Caller CBE (Chair)
Professor Colin Mellors (Deputy Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL
Alison Lowton
Sir Tony Redmond

LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE	Chief Executive
Lynn Ingram	Finance Director
Marcus Bowell	Communications Manager
Tim Bowden	Business Development Manager
Sarah Vallotton	Business & Committee Services Manager
Emily Starkie	Review Officer (items 2 & 4)
Alex Hinds	Review Officer (item 3 & 7)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 5)
Mark Pascoe	Review Officer (item 6)
William Morrison	Review Officer (item 8)
Michelle von.Ahn	Research and Policy Officer (item 20)
Dean Faccini	Business Assistant (minutes)

Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Professor Paul Wiles and Richard Buck, Review Manager. Professor Wiles had sent comments on some of the agenda items which were made known to the Commission as appropriate.

Declarations of interest

Peter Knight declared an interest in item 14, Birmingham City Council, and took no part in the discussion of that item.

The Finance Director declared an interest in item 5, Winchester City Council, and took no part in the discussion of that item.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 16 December

The minutes were agreed as a correct record, and were signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

1. Operational Report - LGBCE (15)01

The Chief Executive presented the Operational Report for January.

The Chief Executive informed the Commission that KPIs had now been added to the Operation Report and would continue to be a regular feature.

The Commission noted its content.

2. Exeter Council Size - LGBCE (15)02

It had been agreed to review Exeter City Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 39 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with Duryard ward having a variance of 19 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 40 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support that the council size decrease by one from 40 to 39 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 39 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 39 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

3. Elmbridge Council Size – LGBCE (15)03

It had been agreed to review Elmbridge Borough Council at the request of the local authority. According to the latest available electoral figures, 14 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 60 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support that the council size decrease by 12 from 60 to 48 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 48 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 48 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Stroud Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)04

The review of Stroud District Council had commenced on 19 August 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 23 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with one ward being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 19 August 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 51 and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on the basis of such a council size.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions it had received and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of nine three-member wards, six two-member wards, and 12 single-member wards in total.

The Commission considered the recommendations in detail informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the advice of officers and the submissions received.

It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Stroud District Council presented.

5. Winchester Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)05

The review of Winchester City Council had commenced on 19 August 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 27 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with one ward being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 August 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 45 and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on the basis of such a council size.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions it had received and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 15 three-member wards in total.

The Commission considered the recommendations in detail informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the advice of officers and the submissions received.

It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Winchester City Council as presented.

6. Knowsley Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)06

The review of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council had commenced on 19 August 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 29 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with Longview ward having a variance of 23 per cent

At its meeting on 18 August 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 45 and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on the basis of such a council size.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions it had received and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 15 three-member wards in total.

The Commission considered the recommendations in detail informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the advice of officers and the submissions received.

It agreed the Draft Recommendations subject to a modification to a ward name in the Prescott and Whiston area.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council as presented subject to a modification of a ward name.

7. Lincoln Final Recommendations - LGBCE (15)07

The review of City of Lincoln Council had commenced on 10 December 2013. According to the latest available electoral figures, 36 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with Carholme ward having a variance of 34 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 March 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 33 and had subsequently, 19 August 2014, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, four submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 11 three-member wards in total.

The Commission considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for City of Lincoln Council presented.

8. Hertfordshire Final Recommendations - LGBCE (15)08

The review of Hertfordshire County Council had commenced on 8 April 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 34 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent with Hatfield North division having a variance of 55 per cent.

At its meeting on 8 April 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 77 and had subsequently, 19 August 2014, agreed Draft Recommendations with an increase of council size by one member to 78.

Following publication, 233 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, it was considered that there was sufficient evidence to undertake a period of further limited consultation focusing on the proposals for the Stevenage area before the Commission considered its Final Recommendations.

Agreed

It agreed a period of further limited consultation focusing on the area of Stevenage.

9. Warwick District Council Consent Case - LGBCE (15)09

The consent case follows a Community Governance Review undertaken by Warwick District Council. The Council had requested that the Commission consented to its plans to make alterations to its parish and parish ward boundaries. If consented, the council would then make a Community Governance Order.

As the alterations would result in clearer boundaries, the team recommended to the Commission that they consented to in this case.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to the consent case.

10. Warwickshire Final Recommendations - LGBCE (15)10

The review of Warwickshire County Council had commenced on 8 April 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 46 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 8 April 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 57 and had subsequently, 19 August 2014, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 63 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 57 single-member divisions in total.

The Commission considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for Warwickshire County Council presented.

11. Newark & Sherwood Related Alterations - LGBCE (15)11

This item was withdrawn by the Chief Executive.

12. Cherwell Review – Lessons Learned - LGBCE (15)12

The Commission noted the report.

The Business Development Manager presented the Quarterly Review Programme Update for the third quarter. The key highlights were:

- Four reviews were brought to the Commission's attention.
 - The Exeter review has been brought forward by two months following a request from the Council.
 - Consultation on division patterns for Nottinghamshire has been extended by three weeks following a request from the Council for an extension.
 - The start of the Kent review had been postponed by two months to allow further time for the authority to produce a submission on council size.
 - The start of the South Lakeland review has been rescheduled to start in August 2015.

All of these changes have been incorporated into the review timetable.

The Commission noted the content of the report. The Chair requested that the team assigns Peter Knight be the lead Commissioner for the forthcoming Lancashire review. The allocation of other reviews to Commissioners would be made subsequently.

14. Birmingham City Council - LGBCE (15)14

The Business Development Manager presented a paper which made recommendations for the Commission to undertake an electoral review of Birmingham City Council.

The Commission considered the team's proposal as presented in the report. It was noted that the Secretary of State had now laid an order to move the council to all-out elections from 2017.

Agreed

- That the Commission would discuss with Birmingham City Council whether they would be requesting the Commission to undertake an electoral review.
- A paper is to be drafted by the team and presented to the Commission at its meeting in February which outlines further the Commission's approach to undertaking a review and detailing its communications strategy.

15. Chair's Report

The Chair reported plans to recruit two new Commissioners. The Department for Communities and Local Government was content with the Chair's proposals to appoint one Commissioner in order to fill the current vacancy and then appoint a further Commissioner at a later date following the completion of Dr Peter Knight's term. The closing date for applications would be the 13 February 2015. Shortlisting would take place at the end of February with interviews taking place in March. It was expected that recommendations for appointment would be made to ministers towards the end of March.

16. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive and Finance Director would be meeting with the LGA to discuss the end of the contract.

The Chief Executive would be meeting with the Speaker's Committee in early February to discuss the LGBCE's financial plans.

17. Risk Update and New & Emerging Risks

The risk update was deferred to February's meeting due to the Risk Management Working Group not being able to meet during the Christmas period.

18. Finance Report – Quarter 3 Projections - LGBCE (15)15

The Finance Director presented the Quarter 3 Finance report. The key highlights included:

- Quarter two projections had shown a year end underspend of £13k. This had now been revised to show a projected underspend of £24k. This was due to the firming up of staffing projections and as a result of fewer reviews taking place in this financial year.
- The Commission had recouped a debt of £30k. It was likely, however, that the Commission would incur court fees of £2k, which it had decided to accept given the additional time and additional expense involved..
- The Commission would write off a debt of £1,479.45 in this year's accounts but would continue to pursue the debt.
- A budget of £158k had been allocated, with detailed expenditure headings, for the Relocation and Back Office project.

The Finance Director gave an update on the Back Office and Relocation projects.

- At the Steering Group meeting in December, a discussion had taken place on the use of the contingency budget. The situation had now changed and this would be discussed at its meeting later in the day.
- Savings on accommodation and service charges were now expected to be approximately £80k. This figure was lower than the original forecast of £100k but it was expected that this would be recovered from the original budget for the office move.
- A brief update was given on the progress of procuring new contracts.
- The main agenda items for the next Steering Group meeting included a conversation focusing on the offices in Milbank and on its recent meetings with Liberata.

19. NAO Value for Money Study - LGBCE (15)16

The NAO presented its findings on this year's value-for-money study. The study focused on the LGBCE's investment in developing an interactive internet-based public consultation portal and the redevelopment of its website.

The review looked at four key areas:

- How the LGBCE had set its project objectives and whether those objectives had been achieved.
- How well the LGBCE's governance structure supported the projects.
- How well the LGBCE managed its project risks.
- Whether the LGBCE delivered against its target time and budget.

The NAO acknowledged the importance of this project for which a significant investment had been made by the LGBCE. They commended the commission for the significant savings that had been achieved. The NAO concluded:

- The project had been a success and had achieved value for money.
- Both projects had been delivered within 3% of the total budget.
- The portal had enabled all review consultation documentation to be published time since its launch.
- The website had facilitated better communications with internal and external stakeholders.

The NAO had also looked at areas where lessons might be learnt.

Its key findings were:

- Skills and experience needed to deliver the project had not been assessed against those within the organisation before the project commenced (in particular reference to the Commissioners).
- It was not easy for the NAO to see if other objectives set by the LGBCE at the beginning of the project had been met as achievement against objectives had not been measured or recorded.
- The risks relating to the portal and website had not been incorporated into the LGBCE's corporate risk register.

The Chief Executive placed on record his thanks to the NAO for the way that they had conducted the work and presented their findings..

20. Presentation on Equalities Profiling

The Policy and Research Officer gave a presentation on 'Equalities Profiling', a project that had been developed through the LGBCE's Equalities Working Group. This tool would allow LGBCE staff to break down electoral data into various different ethnic and socio-economic groupings so that it could be used to further develop equalities screening procedures during the process of conducting electoral reviews as well as potentially offering more general value to the Commission in addressing the communities' aspects of its statutory criteria.

The Commission agreed that the use of this tool had significant potential. It would discuss this further at the Policy Workshop scheduled in February and that, in order to assist this discussion, the team were asked to produce some worked up examples of how the approach might have assisted in previous of reviews.

The Commission placed on record its thanks to Michelle von.Ahn and David Owen for their work on this project.

21. Commission Terms of Reference – Quorum - LGBCE (15)17

The Chief Executive presented a paper which sought to update the Commission's policy on the minimum number of Commissioners required to keep meetings quorate.

Agreed

- That the Commission's Standing Orders be amended to indicating a quorum of three Commissioners for meetings, to include either the Chair or Deputy Chair
- In the absence of a Chair, the Deputy Chair would act as Chair. If the Deputy Chair were excluded from discussing an item due to, for example, a declaration of interest, a nomination would be called for by the Chief Executive and the Commissioners would elect a temporary Deputy Chair for that item.
- If both the Chair and Deputy Chair were unavailable, the meeting could not take place.

22. Law Commission Report - LGBCE (15)18

Following a joint consultation produced by the Law Commission on its review of electoral law, it had been proposed by them that the current responsibility for dealing

with appeals from polling district reviews should transfer from the Electoral Commission to the LGBCE.

The Chief Executive recommended to the Commission that it responded to the consultation by confirming that the LGBCE would be the most appropriate organisation to deal with such appeals.

Agreed

That the Commission respond to the consultation confirming the view that the LGBCE is the most appropriate organisation to deal with polling district appeals.

23. Future Business – LGBCE (15)19

The Commission agreed that the main points for discussion at its next policy workshop would be:

- Performance Management and appraisals
- Work priorities during the coming 6 months.
- Equalities Profiling and the use of Geo-data.

AOB

There were no other items.

Close of Business 13:06

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'M' followed by a horizontal line.

